THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE

Draft Conversion Practices Bill: Joint Committee Call for Evidence

Quick Guide to responding

The draft Bill creates a far-reaching criminal offence with flawed safeguards. It does not require any proof that the accused intended to abuse or harm. The fact that their actions were objectively reasonable is no defence. And Conversion Practices Protection Orders, which could criminalise failure to affirm someone's identity, are even easier to obtain from a court. All this threatens ordinary parenting and the ordinary work of churches, and is incompatible with fundamental rights.

The call for evidence document is available here:
https://committees.parliament.uk/submission/4010/#/evidence/4010/call-for-evidence

REMEMBER

- The deadline for responding is **5pm on Monday 16 November**.
- Be clear and concise.
- Use numbered paragraphs.
- Your evidence must be uploaded as a Word, ODT or RTF file (**not** a PDF) no larger than 25MB. Do not include logos, decorative graphics or repeated headers and footers.
- **You may want to include personal or professional experience, but remember your submission will be published on the Committee website. (You can ask for your personal details to be redacted when you upload your document.)**

THE POLITICS

You are not writing to the Government. You are writing to twelve MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum. They have been asked to scrutinise a Bill and you are helping them. They need points they can include in a report about the Bill. The argument most likely to get through to them is that the proposals are unworkable.

Questions 15 and 16 are the most important. We've suggested some points for you to make below.

PLEASE USE YOUR OWN WORDS.

DRAFTING YOUR RESPONSE: THE KEY QUESTIONS

"15. How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse and those who hold parental rights and responsibilities regarding a child's upbringing?"

- Parents are responsible for teaching, advising, setting boundaries and protecting their children. Those responsibilities do not disappear when a child raises questions about sexual ethics or gender.
- A parent might question a proposed transition, restrict access to pornography or express concerns about potentially harmful interventions. Such actions alone should not be treated as abuse.
- The Government must respect the freedom of parents to bring up their children in accordance with their beliefs. This is protected under human rights law. The Supreme Court has emphasised the importance of families being able to bring up their children in their own way.
- Including economic, emotional and psychological pressure as potential indicators of abuse is unworkable and dangerous. All parents use pressure in conversations with their children. Parenting would be impossible without it.
- Parents must not be at risk of prosecution simply for discouraging their child from taking damaging puberty blockers.
- This threshold risks turning minor family disagreements over values or rules into matters for the police.
- There will inevitably be a risk that parents will be prosecuted merely for trying to guide their children to the path they believe is best for them.
- The law should not criminalise parents for fulfilling their duty to protect their children. Blocking access to dangerous trans videos on YouTube should not make you a criminal.

- The Bill will create a chilling effect. Parents who fear investigation may feel unable to explore the reasons for their child's feelings. Children could lose support from those who know them best and care for them the most.
- The draft Bill makes no distinction between children and adults. But the relationship between a parent and a child is not like an adult relationship. Parents will insist that their children comply with all sorts of minor rules that they would never attempt to impose on another adult.

"16. How far does the draft Bill strike the right balance between the protection of individuals from abuse, and other rights around freedom of religion and belief, conscience, and expression?"

- The Government must explain why it has chosen the term "conversion" to describe what it wants to outlaw. Conversion is a central aspect of the Christian faith. The right to change religion – to convert – is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The Committee must be wary of attempts to target religious people by characterising ordinary, harmless religious practices as 'conversion practices'.
- Clause 1 makes the intention to change what someone believes to be their sexual orientation or gender identity part of the definition. This puts expressions of belief and opinion, which are protected by Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention, within the scope of the offence.
- If the legislation is taken forward, the offence must be much more clearly targeted. It has to ensure that a church which teaches the Christian sexual ethic, and takes steps such as withdrawing membership from people who reject it, cannot be construed as engaging in conversion practices.
- Consent is not a defence. Some church leaders will avoid responding to requests that could later be used against them. This will prevent innocent people from getting the ordinary spiritual support they want. The Bill must make clear that praying with other people, at their request and with their consent, can never be criminalised.
- The proposals would lead to police action against the innocent, ordinary work of churches. This is what some activists campaigning for the Bill want. They are hostile to mainstream, traditional beliefs about biological sex and sexual ethics. The Bill must not create a weapon for them to use against churches.
- It is essential that an adult who wants support from their church to live a celibate life should be free to receive that support without exposing the church to prosecution when others misconstrue that support as a conversion practice.
- Some activists object to biblical teaching about sexual ethics. They are free to do that. But it is not the job of the State to dictate Church doctrine. Repentance from sin of every kind, including sexual sin, is a basic part of the Christian life for every believer. A conversion practices law must not criminalise Christian beliefs.
- The offence will have a chilling effect on churches providing people who identify as LGBTQ with everyday spiritual support, for fear that they may later make accusations of conversion practices against the church.
- Express provision must be made in the Bill to reassure Christians that simply explaining biblical teaching to someone who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as trans will not constitute an abusive conversion practice.
- Christian discipleship and fellowship includes teaching, prayer, repentance and helping one another live according to biblical convictions. Upholding religious freedom means protecting the practice and sharing of beliefs, including in individual conversations.

SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE

Once you've completed your document, go to the call for evidence page:
https://committees.parliament.uk/submission/4010/#/evidence/4010/call-for-evidence

At the bottom of the page, select **'Start submission'**.

At the bottom of each of the next two pages, select **'Continue'**.

You should reach a page headed 'Who are you submitting evidence for?' **'Individual'** will be appropriate for most people, but please select **'Organisation'** if you are responding on behalf of your church. Select **'Continue'** at the bottom of the page.

Enter your details. You must give a last name and email address. Organisations must provide the name of the organisation and the role of the person responding. Select **'Continue'**.

This page is where you upload your response document. Afterwards, you should see the name of your document and the message "Your file is attached". Select **'Continue'** at the bottom of the page.

On the next page, you are able to request that your evidence is anonymous or confidential if you wish, but please note that this is not guaranteed.

You must tick the box confirming that you take full responsibility for your submission and acknowledge how it will be handled. You can then select **'Confirm and submit evidence'**.